

Rejuvenating the Old Time Songs



United States Commissioner of Education in Collecting Colonial Ballads and Southern Melodies,

Hopes to Replace Modern "Popular Songs."



is becoming a lost art in the country. Not so long ago young people were meeting for a party used to sing around the old reed organ and the songs their mothers taught them.

When we sit around the player piano and when we try to sing it is a miserable effort. We must sing what everybody is singing. Everybody is doing it is the motto of everybody and everybody does with all his might what he can, but his might is mighty small.

We have forgotten the old songs and we haven't learned the new ones. We can't learn the new ones, they come upon us too rapidly.

What has become of the young folks who once sat on the door steps and sang "Robin Adair" and "Swanee Ribber"? They are no more. If a young man tries to sing the old songs someone gets a mournful look and in a semi-imitative voice sings and weeps. He thinks he is fully smart and the rest think he is a fool and that is the end of it all.

The life of the popular song is about three months. No one would think of singing "I Wonder Who's Kissing Her Now," because it is several years old. It would be worse to sing that song than to ride in an automobile of the model 1913.

They attempt to sing the latest thing, which some theatrical company has brought to town and one or two hum through the sentences.

In order to combat the ragtime tendency, the United States Commissioner of Education has commissioned Prof. C. A. Smith of the University of Virginia to collect all the old time songs and ballads he could. He also is seeking for the old Southern melodies, which are the only real American music.

That Professor Smith is having trouble finding the songs he is seeking is true. He has appealed to the people of the country to help him. When Professor Smith went in quest of the songs he entered a music store in his home town and asked for a book of old songs.

"Oh, we don't keep any such books," the clerk told Smith, and he looked hurt to learn such a man as Smith should ask for an old, old song book. "We keep nothing but the very latest and very newest songs."

Then Smith appealed to the country.

Philander P. Claxton, commissioner of education, in speaking of the appointment of Smith said:

"Whatever has at any time appealed to the best emotions and moved the heart of a people must have for their children and their children's children political, historical, and cultural value. This is especially true of folk tales and folk songs."

"The English and Scottish popular ballads helped to mold the character of the man and woman who made up the larger part of the Colonial population of this country. For generations these ballads of the lowlands and highlands of England and Scotland were sung along the Atlantic coast and in the valleys of the Appalachian Mountains. The descendants of English, Irish, and Scotch-Irish colonists took many of them with them on their march across the continent, and the ballads were familiar in childhood to millions of men and women whose children have never heard them. Before the march of the public school, the public library, urban civilization, and modern industrial and commercial life, they have vanished like the fresh, cool mist of the morning before the heat of the sun, but they still have their value, and we should not permit them to be lost out of our life. The nation will be the poorer if we do."

BALLADS KEPT ALIVE THROUGH TRADITION.

Prof. Smith in his appeal to the people mails lists of the songs and ballads desired to any who will assist. With the list he sends the following statement:

"One of the greatest pieces of research work ever done by an American was Prof. Francis J. Child's edition in 10 parts of 'The English and Scottish Popular Ballads.' He found that there were 205 of these old ballads, and nobody has yet succeeded in increasing or diminishing this number.

"An interesting discovery made in

recent years is that many of these old ballads were brought by the earliest settlers to the United States and have been kept alive through oral tradition ever since. Prof. Child made no attempt to collect these American survivals, noting them only incidentally. He reports, if my count is correct, 2 in Maine, 2 in New Hampshire, 10 in Massachusetts, 5 in New York, 1 in Pennsylvania, 1 in Maryland, 4 in Virginia, 5 in North Carolina, and 1 in South Carolina. If we omit duplicates, the total is only 17. Now, however, at least 25 of the ballads in Prof. Child's list have been found in the United States and the search has hardly begun. Phillips Barry, of Cambridge, Mass.; Prof. H. M. Belden, of Missouri; Prof. George Lyman Kittredge, of Harvard University; Prof. John A. Lomas, of Texas; and Prof. Hubert G. Shearin, of Kentucky, have been the leaders in this work of recovery, and have thus made every American citizen their debtor.

Sidney Lanier did not overstate it when he said of these old ballads, 'I know that he who walks in the way these following ballads point will be manifold in necessary light, fair in trade, loyal in love, generous to the poor, tender in the household, prudent in living, plain in speech, merry upon occasion, simple in behavior, and honest in all things.' But if our American versions are not collected quickly they can never be collected at all. It is now or never. Many influences are tending to obliterate them. Catchy, but empty, songs not worthy of comparison with them, the decadence of communal singing, the growing diversity of interests, the appeal to what is divisive and separatist in our national life, the presence of the artificial and self-conscious in modern writing are depriving our homes and schoolrooms of a kind of literature which, for community of feeling, for vigor of narrative, for vividness of portraiture, for utter simplicity of style and content is not surpassed in the whole history of English or American song.

EACH STATE ASKED TO AID SEARCH.

"Whether you know any of these 305 ballads or know of them. Perhaps there is a pupil in your school, or a parent, or a patron, or a friend not connected with the school who knows, or is likely to know, several of them. The report even of a fragment will be welcome. You will

be surprised to find that many versions of these old songs are at your very door or may be obtained by a little effort and tact. You are not asked to write down and send on any versions of these ballads. It is desired to know, first, how many of these ballads and how many versions of the same ballad there are in each State. It is believed that the public school teachers are perhaps better fitted than any others to inaugurate a national search, but the co-operation of all into whose hands this circular may fall is earnestly requested. When the returns from the different States have been received and classified, another circular will be issued giving results. With the second circular in hand each State in which there is no folklore or ballad society can form one on a definite basis of ascertainment, results, and thus continue the search. These States or communities that already have such societies can use the information thus acquired in whatever way they deem best. State organizations will be found most efficient in this rescue work. Not until each State feels itself responsible for the collection of the ballads surviving in its own borders will the search be even approximately complete or the results at all satisfactory. But when each State joins in a sort of co-operative

ballad union a work may be written that shall prove not less significant and certainly not less interesting to Americans than Prof. Child's great work itself."

In addition to the songs brought to America by the colonists are the songs of the South. The South is naturally a land of music. Much of their melodies, however, are due

IT'S BAD FORM INDEED FOR WOMEN TO SWOON AS IN FORMER DAYS

In gentler days gone by swooning was supposed to be the natural response of a young woman to any untoward stimulus. In the novels she swooned into the arms of a convenient youth of stalwart proportions, who carried her to safety. What she did in real life when there was no sturdy oak about which she could twine does not

appear. We have always suspected that she then trotted off upon perfectly efficient legs, postponing her swoon until succor was at hand. Today nobody is surprised that the Wellesley young women marched out of their burning dormitory with entire self-possession. They are praised for their intelligence and pluck. But nobody wants them to

faint. In fact, we should be thoroughly ashamed if they had attempted any such nonsense. What was fashionable, in fact quite de rigueur, a century ago is now an annoying bit of idiosyncrasy. We do not know that female nerves and courage and physique have changed extensively. But fashions unquestionably have. Perhaps the femin-

ists and anti-feminists of the hour can explain why.

Pretty Bad.

Blobs—What sort of reputation has B Jones for veracity?

Slobbs—I wouldn't believe him any more than I would believe the oldest inhabitant of a small town.

to the old negro mammies who used to make up the songs to sing to the children they nursed. The songs of the South are unknown in England. They are the real American songs.

The songs brought from England and Scotland by the colonials have been revamped in the mountains of the South and have become Americanized.

Another type of American song is the college song. Most of the college songs, however, originated in

Europe. With slight variations in tune and different words the old German university songs are sung in American colleges today.

The Woman With Forty Cooks.

We are not surprised to read that the Baltimore woman who had forty different cooks in one year finally succumbed to nervous prostration. The only wonder is that she survived to tell the tale. What her special trouble was it is impossible to guess. All women have much to undergo from their cooks, but the experience of forty in a single year is rare and wonderful. We wish this matron would write her autobiography as frankly as Maria Bashkirtseff did and initiate all of us into the inner sanctum of her woes. The spectacle would be horrible, but at the same time it would be instructive. Her sorrows have naturally awakened sympathy among her Maryland sisters. They seem to agree unanimously that something ought to be done to check this appalling transgression of cooks. The queers of the kitchen has reduced herself to a mere floating vision. Today she dawns radiantly. Tomorrow she is cut down as a flower and withereth, or at any rate she flutters away and is not. No doubt her mistress many a time and oft wishes she could wither her and wisheth all in vain. The cook flourishes like the green bay tree. It is the mistress who pines and pines. What ought to be done about it? The Maryland Daughters of the Revolution think the evanescent cook ought to be made to sign a contract binding her to personal service for a fixed period. If she breaks her bond and fades away, she can be sent to jail, where, the chances are, she ought to have been in the first place. The mistresses can then appear at intervals and read her sermons on the sin of fickleness through the bars. This remedy is fascinatingly simple. It reduces the wicked cook to a peonage, or rather slavery, for the period of her contract. If such a law were enacted we are persuaded that the poor Baltimore woman would not have forty cooks the next year or the year after that. She would not have any cook thenceforth forevermore. If we added slavery to all the other discouraging features of domestic service how can we expect girls to enter that way of life? Is it not just barely possible that if the Baltimore dame whose sorrows we are hymning had given her cook a decent room and decent treatment she would have stayed on without any compulsion from the Legislature?

Ready for a Wreck.

"Are there enough lifeboats for all the passengers?"

"No."

"Are there life-preservers for everybody?"

"No."

"Well, hasn't anything been done in preparation for shipwreck?"

"Well, the band has learned to play 'Nearer My God to Thee' in the dark."